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**THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

ASSESSMENT OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING:

An Update to the 2000 Assessment

September 2005

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1. Introduction and Summary

1.1 Overall Status of Fair Housing in Somerville

Since 2000, the City of Somerville has continued its commitment to fair housing and providing a range of housing opportunities. As in 1998 and 2000, impediments to fair housing still exist, but the majority of these remain structural. Lack of land to build upon, high density of existing housing and increasing rental and sales prices have made the pursuit of fair housing seemingly obsolete; the priority for many is for housing of any sort. In addition to this housing crisis, Somerville has seen large increases in racial and ethnic minorities and foreign-born populations over the last 10-15 years. Despite these challenges and potential impediments, the City remains an entry-point for many immigrants and has had very few reports of discrimination in housing since 2000.

Somerville's residents are faced with increasing housing costs and shrinking incomes in relation to these costs. Despite some modest differences, however, these hardships are equally spread across all racial and ethnic groups, indicating that Somerville remains a city of equal access. Concentrations of minorities, immigrants and lower-income households in East Somerville have not dissipated since the last Assessment of Impediments was conducted in 2000, but the City continues to conduct outreach and offer services to a wide range of Somerville residents.

This study discusses the specific impediments facing Somerville and the City's progress since 2000. While many of the impediments remain the same due to structural and market forces beyond the City's control, much progress has been made in providing affordable housing opportunities. In addition, an increased focus on job creation and the link between economic development and housing opportunities has led the City to create several new programs and policies to combat the existing impediments to fair housing.

1.2 Issues Considered

As explored in the 1998 and 2000 Assessments of Impediments, this study revisits the following issues to examine Somerville's progress and current challenges.

- Are housing programs operated by the City equally available to all members of the community?
- Are funds distributed fairly in relation to the community's population?
- Are there sufficient resources available to the community to ensure fair housing laws are enforced?
- How accessible is the City's housing stock? What is the need for housing adapted for persons with physical disabilities?
- What special issues face new immigrants? People with disabilities? Families?
- How have state or federal laws and/or regulations helped or hindered equal housing opportunity in Somerville?

- Which of the identified impediments can the city impact with appropriate policies and programs? Which ones will require a regional, state, or federal solution?
- What is the availability of employment and training for low-income families within the community?
- What regional efforts are being made to affirmatively further fair housing and how is the city cooperating with these efforts?

2. Jurisdictional Background Data

2.1 Historical and Anecdotal History of Somerville

The City of Somerville is located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, just north of Boston. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2004, the city had a total population of 75,621. With only 4.1 square miles of land, Somerville is the most densely populated community in New England. Established as a town in 1842, Somerville was separated from the urbanizing Charlestown because it was still largely rural. However, by the early 1900's, Somerville itself had become a dense urban area, welcoming immigrants from across Europe.

Today, Somerville hosts an eclectic mix of blue-collar families, young professionals, college students and recent immigrants from countries as diverse as El Salvador, Haiti, and Brazil. It is known for its large number of squares, which help mark neighborhood boundaries while also featuring bustling business and entertainment centers. Among the most active today are Davis Square, Union Square, Ball Square, Teele Square and Magoun Square. Surrounding these squares and in other parts of the City, residential uses predominate.

Between 1990 and 2000, Somerville saw immense changes in its population. Large increases in Blacks, Hispanics, and Foreign-born residents have continued over the last 5 years, since the last Assessment of Impediments was performed in 2000. In 2000, 23% of Somerville's residents were considered minorities, nearly 9% were Hispanic, and an overwhelming 29% were foreign born. Providing equal access to housing to this diverse group of residents is a growing challenge in the tight housing market of today.

With vacancy rates still hovering around 1%, housing prices rapidly increasing while incomes moderate, and a deteriorating housing stock due to age, Somerville is faced with many obstacles to providing fair housing opportunities. However, many programs, funds, and organizations in Somerville are working to do just that. Although, as described below, several areas of Somerville remain racially and economically segregated, the City is working hard to improve access for all Somervillians.

2.2 Income Data

In 2005, the City of Somerville remains a city of modest incomes. Since 1989, incomes in Somerville have risen only 16%, whereas from 1979 to 1989 they rose 40%. Family median income has actually decreased since 1989, falling 1% in 1999. Even as housing, health care and other essential costs rise, Somerville residents are not seeing an increase in their incomes that can keep pace. Per capita income has increased the most rapidly, most likely as a result of shrinking household sizes.

Somerville Inflation-Adjusted Median Incomes – 1979-1999¹

Incomes (1999 dollars)	1979	1989	1999	Change 1979-1989	Change 1989-1999	Change 1979-1999
Per capita	14,573	20,399	23,628	40%	16%	62%
Household Median	33,047	43,605	46,315	32%	6%	50%
Family Median	41,811	51,770	51,243	24%	-1%	23%

*Adjusted using CPI-U, US Average- All Cities

In relation to the rest of the state, Somerville has actually seen improvements in its income rankings among the 351 jurisdictions in Massachusetts. From 1989 to 1999, Somerville's rank in terms of median household income improved from 275 to 265. However, as reflected in the decrease in median family income from 1989 to 1999, Somerville's rank for this category fell from 273 to 297. Despite these modest increases in median household income and per capita income, Somerville is still not a wealthy community.

Household Median Income is not the same across racial and ethnic groups in Somerville. Asian households have significantly higher incomes and Black households have significantly lower incomes. Both White and Hispanic household incomes are close to the overall Median Household Income of \$46,315.

1999 Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity²

	Median Household Income	Difference from Total	% Difference from Total
Total Households	\$46,315		
White Households	\$47,747	\$1,432	3.1%
Black Households	\$41,648	-\$4,667	-10.1%
Asian Households	\$50,130	\$3,815	8.2%
Hispanic Households	\$46,265	-\$50	-0.1%

The number of families with incomes below the poverty line is also indicative of the prevalence of low-income households in Somerville. Since 1989, the number of families below poverty has increased, as has the number of individuals above the age of 17.

¹ Source: City of Somerville Final Five Year Consolidated Plan April 1, 2003-March 31, 2008.

² Source: US Census 2000.

Poverty Status of Somerville Population– 1989 and 1999³

	1989	1999	1989 Poverty rate	1999 Poverty rate	Change	% Change
Persons whose poverty status determined	74,061	75,199			1,138	1.50%
Total persons below poverty	8,492	9,395	11.50%	12.50%	903	10.60%
Persons 18-64	5,755	6,663	10.80%	11.80%	908	15.80%
Persons 65 or older	978	1,063	10.80%	13.60%	85	8.70%
Persons age 17 or younger	1,759	1,669	15.30%	15.20%	-90	-5.20%
Families whose poverty status determined	14,876	14,592				
Total families below poverty	1,221	1,254	7.60%	8.40%	33	2.70%

While the White population has the lowest poverty rate, no racial or ethnic group in Somerville has a poverty rate below 11%. The highest rate is among the Asian population. This is likely because this ethnic group is composed largely of new immigrants.

Population Below Federal Poverty Level 1999 by Race/Ethnicity⁴

	Total for whom poverty status determined	White alone	Black or African American Alone	Asian alone	Other race alone	2+ races	Hispanic or Latino	White alone non-Hispanic
Total:	75,199	58,040	4,717	4,698	3,760	3,596	6,494	54,737
Below poverty level:	9,395	6,587	734	829	619	578	955	6,146
Under 5 years	575	278	136	34	36	82	73	271
5-17	1,094	597	145	44	182	108	225	556
Subtotal age 0-17	1,669	875	281	78	218	190	298	827
18 to 64 years	6,663	4,730	402	734	395	381	657	4,337
65 to 74 years	489	423	36	17	6	7	0	423
75 years and over	574	559	15	0	0	0	0	559
Total Poverty rate	12.5%	11.3%	15.6%	17.6%	16.5%	16.1%	14.7%	11.2%
% of Poor		70.1%	7.8%	8.8%	6.6%	6.2%	10.2%	65.4%

With the total poverty rate increasing, median family income decreasing and median household income beginning to level out, Somerville must focus on the needs of its residents and seek ways to provide services that incomes make impossible to obtain independently.

2.3 Demographics and Concentration Data

As done in the 2000 Assessment of Impediments and the 1998 version before, an area of concentration is defined in this report for clarity. For this report, any census tract that has 5% higher concentration than the City's overall percentage will be considered an area of concentration. This report has calculated census tracts of concentration by

³ Source: City of Somerville Final Five Year Consolidated Plan April 1, 2003-March 31, 2008.

⁴ Source: City of Somerville Final Five Year Consolidated Plan April 1, 2003-March 31, 2008.

percentage of minorities, Hispanics, foreign-born residents and low-income households. Please see Appendix A for a map of the census tracts in Somerville.

Minorities

The City of Somerville overall has seen an increase in its percentage of minorities. Since the last Assessment of Impediments, the percentage of minorities in Somerville has increased from 12% in 1990 to 23% in 2000, an increase of 11%. Only three census tracts, 3501, 3514, and 3515 contain significantly larger proportions (greater than 28%) of minority residents than the city average. However, an additional five census tracts, 3504, 3505, 3509, 3510, and 3511, all have significantly less minority residents (less than 18%) than the city average, indicating that Somerville's neighborhoods are still segregated.

In addition, the percentage of Hispanic residents is concentrated in several census tracts as well. Citywide, roughly 8.6% of residents are Hispanic. Census tracts 3501 and 3514 are the only tracts with a significantly larger Hispanic population than the city average (greater than 13%), but again several census tracts have significantly less Hispanics than the city wide average (less than 3%), including tracts 3504, 3505, 3508, and 3510.

According to these calculations, only three census tracts in the City, 3501, 3514 and 3515, are considered "an area of racial/ethnic concentration". These tracts are different from the last assessment performed in 2000, most likely because that assessment was based on data from the 1990 census. All three of these census tracts are located in East Somerville.

Immigrants

Another category in which concentration can be a factor in services and needs is the percentage of the population that is foreign born. In 2000, 29.3% of Somerville residents were foreign born. The same census tracts with significantly higher concentrations of minority and Hispanic populations also have significantly higher concentrations of foreign-born residents (more than 34%): tracts 3501, 3514, and 3515. All three of these tracts are located in East Somerville. Again, several census tracts have significantly lower concentrations of foreign-born populations, including tracts 3504, 3505, 3506, 3508, 3509, and 3510.

Low-Income Households

Median Household Income in 1999 in Somerville was \$46,315. As noted above, this is a slight increase over the median household income for the City in 1989. However, concentrations of lower-income households may indicate a problem regarding the distribution of affordable housing units. Census tracts where the median household income is at or below 80% of the City's median household income will be considered an "area of low-income concentration". These census tracts have a median household

income of less than or equal to \$37,052. Census tracts 3513, 3514, and 3515 are considered areas of low-income concentration. Census tracts 3504, 3505, and 3506 have median household incomes in excess of 120% of the City's median household income.

2.4 Employment Data

The economic health of a city can be a good basis for determining whether opportunities exist for both minority and non-minority groups. With a large immigrant community and a high concentration of minorities, foreign-born populations and low-income households in East Somerville, it can be helpful to examine the employment trends in Somerville. Employment is often the first step towards being able to afford access to housing.

According to the 1997 Economic Census (the latest for which city level data is available), Somerville had 5,508 businesses employing 20,673 employees. This indicates an increase of roughly 2,000 jobs since the last Assessment of Impediments was performed in 1998. Unemployment in the City of Somerville has remained fairly low over the past decade as well, hovering around 3-4%. Unemployment reached its lowest percentage in 2000, at 1.9% and then increased in 2001 and 2002, most likely as a result of the events surrounding September 11, 2001.

Employment Statistics for Somerville 1995-2004⁵

Year	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
1995	43823	42034	1789	4.1
1996	44176	42694	1482	3.4
1997	44991	43666	1325	2.9
1998	45219	44133	1086	2.4
1999	45283	44240	1043	2.3
2000	48398	47470	928	1.9
2001	48491	47016	1475	3.0
2002	46034	43971	2063	4.5
2003	45429	43260	2169	4.8
2004	46755	44893	1862	4.0

Despite the gains in total jobs and relatively low unemployment rates, Somerville's minority populations are not reaping the benefits as much as their non-minority counterparts. In 2000, when overall unemployment rates were as low as 1.9% overall, racial and ethnic minorities were experiencing much higher unemployment rates. Blacks had an unemployment rate over 8% and Hispanics and Asians also reported higher unemployment than their White counterparts.

⁵ Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Unemployment Rate by Race/Ethnicity Population in Somerville
Age 16+ in 2000⁶**

White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
2.9%	8.4%	3.7%	4.8%

Business ownership statistics report similar inequities based on race and ethnicity, as well as gender. While 23% of Somerville's residents are minorities, only 10% of all firms in Somerville are minority-owned. Firms with employees (individual self-employed workers are considered firms *without* employees) have an even lower percentage of minority owners; only 5.5% of these are minority-owned. Most strikingly, none of the firms with employees were owned by someone identifying as Black. Female-owned businesses are much more prominent, but still not as highly represented as would be expected based on population.

Women and Minority-Owned Businesses in Somerville in 1997⁷

Group	All Firms		Firms with Paid Employees		
	#	%	#	%	Employees
Universe (All Firms)	5,508	100.0%	1,193	100.0%	20,673
Total minorities	562	10.2%	66	5.5%	368
Black	151	2.7%	0	0.0%	0
Hispanic	175	3.2%	43	3.6%	301
Asian and Pacific Islander	198	3.6%	24	2.0%	67
Women	1,519	27.6%	140	11.7%	2,222

The significance of these employment trends is large. It is likely that the three census tracts with the highest percentages of minorities, foreigners and low-income household also have the highest unemployment rates and lowest business ownership rates. These racial and ethnic factors can mitigate the positive effects of the City's overall job growth and low unemployment and should be closely monitored.

3. Development Constraints

The development constraints identified in earlier Assessments of Impediments to Fair Housing remain the same in 2005. As defined in the Five-Year Consolidated Plan for 2003-2008, these constraints are:

- the high cost of existing real estate and the high cost of new construction
- the dearth of developable land sites and the high costs of those few sites, given the demand by private developers of market rate housing, and
- the reduction in state and federal funding to create additional units of affordable housing and expand rental assistance.

⁶ Source: US Census 2000.

⁷ Source: 1997 U.S. Economic Census.

3.1 Housing Profile

The greatest constraint on development in Somerville is the lack of available land. By 1920, over 85% of the City's existing housing units were already built. Since then, new housing construction has been sparse. High land costs due to scarcity combined with increasing costs of construction and labor make it difficult to develop even the small amount of available land. Since 2002, only 92 new units have been built, while 28 were demolished, resulting in a net gain of only 64 units.

New and Demolished Units in Somerville⁸

Year	# of Residential Units Demolished	# of New Residential Units Constructed	Net Gain/Loss of Units
2002	16	38	22
2003	6	33	27
2004	6	21	15
Total	28	92	64

The majority of Somerville's existing housing units are contained in two and three-family homes; nearly 70% of the residential buildings in Somerville are two or three-family homes and these buildings contain over 60% of the City's housing units. The condition of these units is generally worse than newer construction, most often multi-family condominium structures. According to the Assessor's Department, roughly 200 single, two and three-family buildings are considered to be in poor or fair condition, as compared to only 3 condominium buildings and 5 buildings with 4-8 units.

The majority of Somerville residents are renters as well. In 2005, it is estimated that 66% of Somervillians are renters, while only 34% own their homes. In 2000, 69% of residents rented. The number of renter-households in Somerville has fallen slightly in the past few years due to the large numbers of condominium conversions, but Somerville still remains a renter's city. Without significant new construction, condominium conversions have been the main driving force in the changes in Somerville's housing stock, creating units in better condition and providing more affordable home-ownership opportunities.

Condo Conversion Impact on Tenure Type 2000-2005⁹

	Total Occupied Units	Owner-Occupied	Change 2000-2005	% Owner-Occupied	% Change 2000-2005	Renter-Occupied	Change 2000-2005	% Renter-Occupied	% Change 2000-2005
2000	31555	9656		30.6%		21899		69.4%	
2005	31661	10873	1217	34.3%	3.7%	20788	-1111	65.7%	-3.7%

⁸ Source: City of Somerville Inspectional Services Department.

⁹ Source: 2000 U.S. Federal Census, Somerville Assessing Department, Somerville Inspectional Services Department and Somerville Condominium Review Board.

Despite the increases in condominium conversions, Somerville is still well below the national average of homeownership, which has remained around 69% for the past few years.

Vacancy rates in Somerville have been extremely low recently. A healthy vacancy rate is generally considered to be around 5%. According to the 2000 Census, the overall vacancy rate in Somerville was 1.5% for rental units and 1.1% for ownership units. For certain types of units, such as rental units affordable to a household making less than 30% of Area Median Income, the vacancy rate was essentially zero. Indications are that the vacancy rate has risen slightly as the rental market has softened since 2003, but opportunities for affordable housing units are still scarce.

In addition to low vacancy rates, large numbers of Somerville residents have housing problems, which includes rent burden, overcrowding and insufficient kitchen and bathroom facilities. 39% of all renters and 42% of all owners were experiencing a housing problem of some sort in 2000.

3.2 Rent and Sale Prices

In addition to moderating incomes and high vacancy rates, Somerville residents are faced with escalating housing costs. Rental units are slightly more affordable than homeownership units, and condominiums, despite their current appeal, remain more affordable than single-family homes. The average rent for one, two and three bedroom apartments in Somerville in 2005 appears below.

Average Rent by Bedroom Size for New Movers in 2005¹⁰

1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom
\$ 1,186	\$ 1,433	\$ 1,832

These rents are slightly higher than those reported by the Greater Boston Housing Report Card in 2003, indicating that while rents seem to have moderated, they are still increasing. The change in rents from 1999-2003 and the percentage of median income needed to rent an apartment appears below.

Advertised Rents vs. Median Renter Income¹¹

1999 Median Renter Income	1999 Median Rent	% of Income Needed for Rent	2002 est. Median Renter Income	2002 Median Rent	% of Income Needed for Rent	2003 est. Median Renter Income	2003 Median Rent	% of Income Needed for Rent
\$ 42,251	\$ 1,200	34%	\$ 45,166	\$ 1,350	36%	\$ 46,053	\$ 1,300	34%

In general, it is considered wise to spend no more than 30% of gross income on housing costs. As the chart above indicates, this is hard to do in Somerville.

¹⁰ Source: Boston.com advertised rents in Somerville for one, two and three bedroom units on July 1, 2005.

¹¹ Source: Greater Boston Housing Report Card, The Boston Foundation and Citizens' Housing and Planning Association, April 2004, <http://www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/HousingRCard2c.pdf>

Ownership costs are similarly high. Since 2000, the average costs of a single-family home and a condominium have both risen. Condominiums, despite costs rising more consistently in these 5 years, remain more affordable than single-family homes.

Average Sales Price by Housing Type 2000-2005¹²

	Single-Family	% Change	Condo	% Change	All Sales	% Change
2000	\$ 229,000		\$242,000		\$310,000	
2001	\$ 280,000	22%	\$279,875	16%	\$339,000	9%
2002	\$ 329,500	18%	\$310,000	11%	\$375,000	11%
2003	\$ 362,500	10%	\$327,750	6%	\$390,000	4%
2004	\$ 381,000	5%	\$322,750	-2%	\$400,000	3%
2005*	\$ 428,450	12%	\$364,850	13%	\$464,000	16%
Change 2000-2005	\$ 199,450	87%	\$122,850	51%	\$154,000	50%

* 2005 Data through May only

The costs of housing, the condition of housing and the scarcity of land all constrain the development of more housing options, making the provision of fair housing a great effort for Somerville.

4. City Progress since 2000

With increasing numbers of minorities, foreign-born residents and households below the poverty line, Somerville is faced with many challenges. In addition, the increasing costs of housing and the structural constraints on providing more units is increasingly difficult to contend with. However, Somerville has a strong commitment to Fair Housing. As in 2000, the main impediment to fair housing is access to affordable housing.

The City recognizes these challenges and continues its efforts to support Somerville residents who are struggling to survive and wish to remain in Somerville.

4.1 New Programs to Alleviate Impediments

Since the 2000 Assessment, the City has created and applied for several new programs and funding sources to alleviate the impediments to fair housing described above. These programs, in addition to the existing programs that the City maintains a commitment to, will help to increase opportunities and raise awareness.

Union Square Revitalization

In 2002, the Somerville Office of Housing and Community Development (now the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development) began a study of the Union Square neighborhood to create a revitalization plan. The Union Square Master Plan and Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan will help guide the redevelopment of this neighborhood. In addition to transportation planning and streetscape improvements, extensive efforts to improve Union Square's economic development will provide much needed opportunities for income and investment in

¹² The Warren Group Real Estate and Financial Information, www.thewarrengroup.com.

this community. A Union Square Main Street program was launched in Winter 2005 and will contribute to these efforts and maintain the improvements made by the City while enhancing the neighborhood independently as well.

East Somerville Revitalization

In the summer of 2005, the City of Somerville began work on the creation of its second Main Streets program, this one centered in East Somerville. As this report highlights, East Somerville has the highest concentration of minorities, immigrants and low-income households, making its residents more susceptible to unfair housing practices. The East Somerville Main Street program will focus on economic revitalization of the community as well as empowerment of the residents, helping to alleviate some of the problems the neighborhood has historically experienced. In addition, efforts should work to equalize East Somerville's attractiveness with other sections of the City, encouraging more private investment and greater opportunities for its residents.

Healthy Homes Grant

In June of 2005, the City of Somerville submitted an application for a Healthy Homes grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The purpose of the grant is to provide resources to local jurisdictions for comprehensive environmental housing-related hazards. The program brings together a variety of strategies to create a more holistic approach, rather than the piecemeal one currently employed. If awarded the grant, the Housing Department will work closely with other departments in the City to administer the grant.

10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

As part of President Bush's initiative to end chronic homelessness, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has suggested that local jurisdictions should create a 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Somerville has begun this effort, convening a forum involving business leaders, city officials and service agencies to discuss and create a draft of this plan. The Plan will serve as a guide for service agencies and the City to provide needed services and will also provide a list of ways for local businesses to get involved.

4.2 New Legislation to Alleviate Impediments

The City of Somerville has been very progressive over the years in its attempts to provide affordable, safe and attractive housing options. Somerville boasts an Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, an Affordable Housing Trust, Linkage Fees for commercial development and a host of other programs that provide fair housing options. While no new legislation has been created since 2000, several modifications to existing policies will impact fair housing provision.

Inclusionary Housing Ordinance

In 2001, Somerville approved a significant change to the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance. Previously, developers of buildings with 8 units or more were required to provide 10% of their units (either in actual units or cash-in-lieu-of fees) to the City of

Somerville for affordable housing. The changes to the ordinance raised this percentage to 12.5%, increasing the number of affordable housing units to be contributed by private developers. In addition, in 2005 the Board of Aldermen approved a change to the calculation formula for cash-in-lieu-of fees. Prior to this, the calculation was extremely punitive, asking for 200% of the monetary difference between market-rate and affordable units. In order to make this option more attractive, and therefore provide the Affordable Housing Trust, the beneficiary of these fees, with more money for disbursement, the new calculation is only 100% of this amount. Both of these actions will result in more affordable housing and more of the most suitable type of units.

Project Mitigation Fees

Commercial developments requiring special permits with over 30,000 square feet of commercial space trigger the Linkage Ordinance in Somerville. These developers are required to pay a dollar amount per square foot above the 30,000 limit. In 2005, the linkage fee amount was increased from \$2.61 per square foot to \$3.91 per square foot. This change will greatly increase the amount of money deposited into the Affordable Housing Trust fund for housing programs, development and services.

4.3 New Projects Funded to Alleviate Impediments

Since 2000, many new housing projects have been started, completed and proposed. These developments all contribute to increased affordable housing in Somerville. Included below is a list of the applicable projects and a brief description. In addition, a chart itemizing the Inclusionary Housing units produced or projected for the near future is included.

Completed

301 Medford Street-Next Step House

This 6-unit development, developed by Just-A-Start Corporation in 2004, will provide rental housing for 6 households in Somerville. Three of the units are available to households making up to 80% of AMI; the other three are available to households making up to 50% of AMI. The City has invested both CDBG and Affordable Housing Trust funds in this project.

110 Walnut Street

This 12-unit apartment building was subsidized by DHCD through Section 8 certificates and was at risk of having its affordability requirements expire. The Somerville Community Corporation purchased the building in 2003 and with the help of City money rehabilitated the units and maintains its affordability now.

34 Linden Street

Also owned by SCC, this 42-unit development is spread through 7 buildings. All of the units are affordable and a large proportion of them are two and three bedroom units, providing housing opportunities for larger families in Somerville.

RESPOND SRO

Respond, Inc., a domestic violence agency providing services to women and children, developed an 8-unit single room occupancy (SRO) development in Somerville in 2004. These 8 units provide affordable housing options for battered and abused women and their children, a greatly needed resource.

Mt. Vernon Street Properties Expiring Use Preservation

In the summer of 2005, three privately owned properties receiving Section 8 subsidies to sustain affordable housing were at risk of expiring. Totaling 23 units, these three properties were under no obligation to remain affordable. This would have left 23 low-income households without housing. The City of Somerville worked closely with the owner of the properties, DHCD and SCC to ensure that the units would remain affordable for at least another year, providing residents with peace of mind and the City of Somerville and other affordable housing providers an opportunity to formulate a plan for long-term affordability.

In Progress

Visiting Nurse Assisted Living Development at Conwell School

The VNA is in the process of obtaining full funding for a second assisted living facility in Somerville. Located on the old Conwell School property in West Somerville, the proposal includes 95 units of assisted living, 72 of which will be affordable. The remaining 23 units will be rented at market-rate. The developer is also hoping to partner with the Somerville Housing Authority to renovate and include sections of the Capen Court elderly public housing development adjacent to the property.

Temple Street

This 15-unit condominium development is slated for completion in spring of 2006. Developed by SCC, the development will consist of two and three bedroom homeownership units, providing family-size households with affordable homeownership options. Eight of the units will be affordable to households earning up to 80% of AMI.

109 Gilman Street

Also owned by SCC, the building at 109 Gilman Street will be rehabilitated to house 6 affordable rental units. Several units are currently occupied by income-eligible tenants and will remain so until natural attrition occurs. Four of the units will be affordable to households earning up to 80% of AMI, while 2 will be affordable to households earning up to 30% of AMI, made possible by a McKinney Grant from HUD. The Somerville Affordable Housing Trust has also committed funds for acquisition costs.

Pipeline Projects

The City also has two additional sites that are expected to be developed at least partially into affordable housing in the near future. They include St. Polycarp's and 49-51 Allen Street.

Inclusionary Housing Units

Through the City's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance, Somerville's Housing Department has marketed and sold or rented 37 affordable units since 2000. In addition, another 18 units will be available through this program in the next few years.

New Affordable Units Created Through Inclusionary Zoning 2000-2005¹³

Project Name	Constructed Units	Affordable Units	Sold	Rental
394-400 Washington Street	14	1		2001
63 Gorham Street, Bldg 1 & 2	15	2	2001	
Weston View Condos	19	2	2002	
Sanctuary 60 Tufts Street	17	2	2003	
Union Place, Phase I	31	6	2003	
17 Ivaloo Street	18	2	2003	
24-26 Line Street	5	1	2003	
7 Avon Place	5	1	2003	
Union Place Townhomes	12	2	2004	
63 Gorham Street, Bldg 3 - 5 72-74 Berkley Street	22	3	2004	
Union Place, Phase II	19	4	2004	
384 Washington Street	10	1	2004	
Union Place, Phase III	35	8	2005	
50 Bow Street	14	2	2005	
Total Completed	236	37		

Units in Pipeline Through Inclusionary Zoning¹⁴

Project Name	Total Units	Affordable Units	Projected For Sale	Projected For Rent	Fractional Payout	Off Site Comp
140 Jacques Street	5	1	1		N/A	N
24 Marshall Street	11	1	1		Y	N
Durell School	8	1	1		N/A	N
165 Beacon Street	17	3		3	N/A	Y
27 Osgood Street	14	3	3		N/A	Y
Logan Post	20	3	3		N/A	Both
24 Adams St	5	1	1		N/A	N
131 Willow/Morrison	10	1	1		Y	N
35 Charlestown St	34	4	4		Y	N
Total in Pipeline	124	18	15	3		

In addition to those projects already completed and those in the development phase, several more projects have building permits pending and will be subject to Inclusionary Zoning rules as well. These include:

¹³ Source: City of Somerville Housing Division Database.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- 515 Somerville Avenue
- Davis Design Howard Street
- 438 Somerville Avenue
- 280 Broadway
- 343 Summer Street

5. Distribution of Funds in Relation to City's Populations

The City's programs for affordable housing are well distributed throughout the City's neighborhoods and particular emphasis is put on informing all City residents of programs and services. The Housing Division's website contains thorough information on all of the programs offered as well as links to other useful resources. Bilingual staff has helped to alleviate communication problems with non-English speaking clients. The East Somerville and Union Square Main Streets programs have and will continue to increase the visibility of problems to be addressed in these underserved areas, as well as drawing upon the assets of these neighborhoods.

The City's Homebuyer Training classes draw large crowds every session and are held in handicapped-accessible rooms. The Inclusionary Housing program has created affordable units distributed across the City, providing opportunities for affordable units in sections of the City that have traditionally had lower percentages of minorities and low-income households.

The Somerville Affordable Housing Trust fund has also chosen Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, Inc. as one of their fiscal year 2005 Program Grantees. This organization provides housing counseling and educational services to low-income Portuguese speakers. This growing population will be introduced to housing opportunities and a variety of services that will provide increased fair housing access.

The Housing Department also runs programs for lead abatement and rehabilitation for income eligible households, and both of these programs are accessible to all Somerville residents and advertised on the City's website. These programs in particular increase fair housing access for families with children and disabled individuals, as they provide resources to landlords that may not have been able to afford necessary upgrades and concessions to house these populations.

6. Fair Housing Enforcement

6.1 Complaints

Since 2000, Fair Housing complaints received by the City have remained low. Several large issues, however, have been reported and addressed in Somerville. Most often, the Fair Housing Commission receives calls from residents requesting information on tenant and landlord rights. These issues can usually be handled internally by the Housing Department staff and do not result in the filing of a complaint.

In the 2000 Assessment of Impediments, Clarendon Hill Towers was flagged as a Fair Housing complaint area. Several tenants had filed complaints indicating that the management of the 497-unit apartment complex in West Somerville was involved in racial discrimination. This case was brought to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) in 2000 (?) and a tenant also independently sued the management of the development, bringing the case to the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General. In 2003, Clarendon Hill Tower's management company was found guilty of discrimination. As part of the settlement, the Attorney General has appointed an outside monitor to oversee the management and rental practices of the development for seven years.

In addition to the Clarendon Hill complaints, the City has received 12 complaints of housing discrimination since the last Assessment of Impediments. Only two of these complaints were filed with MCAD, both in fiscal year 2004. The majority of complaints received by the City are reported by households experiencing discrimination based on income source (Section 8, SSI, SSDI) or household composition (having children). Both of these populations are protected under Fair Housing laws. In order to decrease these instances of discrimination, the City's lead abatement program provides funds to landlords who may be reluctant to rent to families with children due to lead paint laws.

6.2 Education and Information Programs

One of the most important steps to eliminating discriminatory practices in housing is Education. Many people are simply not aware of their rights and responsibilities, resulting in violations of Fair Housing laws. Since 2000, the Fair Housing Commission and the Housing Department have been active in performing outreach and education about fair housing to dispel myths and increase the discourse around these issues. The Fair Housing Commission is currently in the process of being reappointed, but has still maintained its outreach activities.

April is National Fair Housing Month and Somerville has routinely held a variety of activities to promote education about fair housing during this month. In 2001, the Fair Housing Commission sponsored a poster competition in the Somerville public schools. In 2002, the Commission aired a Fair Housing video on the City's Cable Access Station and created an op-ed for local newspapers. In 2003, the Commission sponsored a Fair Housing training for city employees and local non-profits as well as holding readings in the public libraries for children about discrimination.

In addition to Fair Housing Month activities, the City has created and updated its website with useful information for both tenants and landlords. The Tenant's Helper handbook and a listing of frequently asked questions are some of the more valuable inclusions. In 2001, amidst severe shortages in Section 8 funds, the Commission partnered with the Somerville Housing Authority to create a brochure for Section 8 tenants outlining their rights. In 2003, the Commission conducted a workshop on Lead Paint Abatement and Fair Housing for local brokers.

The City's First-Time Homebuyer Training classes also address fair housing issues. Included in the course curriculum is information on city-run programs, lead paint abatement and fair housing laws.

In addition, the Housing Department has several bi-lingual employees who are able to disburse information to a wider range of the population. With increasing numbers of immigrants in the City, it is important to provide information about programs and services in a full range of languages.

6.3 Future Activities Planned to Ensure Fair Housing in Somerville

The City is in the process of bringing the Fair Housing Commission up to its full capacity. In the meantime, the Housing Department has been updating and expanding the Commission's website and providing more information through the Housing Division's website. The Housing Division is also in the process of conducting a Housing Needs Assessment, which will address which populations in Somerville may be experiencing housing problems and potential discrimination.

Most importantly, however, attention to the lack of affordable housing and efforts to increase affordable units will have the greatest impact. With fewer options, tenants are willing to accept worse conditions, landlords are unable or unwilling to provide adequate services and residents afraid of losing their housing are unlikely to report discrimination or poor treatment. As noted above in the City's progress since 2000, there are many ongoing efforts being taken to alleviate the housing problems experienced by Somerville residents. New construction of affordable units, preservation of existing affordable units, and housing assistance in the form of lead paint abatement, housing rehabilitation and eviction mediation are necessary. Affordable rental and homeownership opportunities are necessary. Education and outreach efforts are necessary. A connection to economic development is necessary as well. The City is aware of these needs and is working to improve upon and expand its programs to create more access to fair housing.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Reports that the housing crisis in the Greater Boston Metropolitan Region is dissipating are widespread, yet the damage done by increasing housing costs and incomes that do not keep pace will not disappear without hard work. The Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2004 reports that this region is now the most expensive place to live in the nation. This has put a strain on all segments of the population, but can have the most damaging effects on more vulnerable populations, such as minorities, immigrants and low-income families. These populations are often forced out of the housing market as it becomes more expensive and more exclusive.

At the regional level, there has been a great amount of debate around what can be done to improve housing conditions and access to fair housing. The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination continues to field discrimination complaints and many organizations have begun to take up the cause of promoting fair housing through

structural changes. These efforts, while important, will take time to trickle down to the local level.

Within the City of Somerville, however, three activities have emerged as the most efficient way to remove impediments to fair housing. These include:

- Promotion of and Education about Fair Housing
- Equal Access for all Residents to Housing Services and Programs (including linguistically isolated populations)
- Increased Stock of Affordable Housing Options within the City of Somerville

These three strategies, combined with increased coordination of efforts and attention to economic development, should be able to lessen the impediments to fair housing.

The City has begun efforts in all three areas to address impediments, and as described in this report, has a continued commitment to improving upon programs, adjusting legislation to obtain ideal results and creating and applying new policies to increase access and equality within housing.

Appendix A: Map of Census Tracts in Somerville

Somerville and Surrounding Cities and Towns divided by census tracts

